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# Should We Erase Our Bad Memories?

A NEW DRUG COULD GET RID OF OUR WORST MEMORIES

**J**ust for a moment, think about the worst thing that has ever happened to you. Now imagine that you could take a pill and erase that memory forever. Would you do it?

That might sound like a question out of a science-fiction movie. Someday, however, you may actually have this choice. A team of scientists at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore recently discovered a chemical that can permanently delete the memory of a traumatic event. So far, the chemical has been tested only in mice. It is quite possible, though, that scientists could eventually develop a memory-erasing drug for humans.

It's a possibility that's raising many difficult questions.

### Forget About It

We all have some bad memories. Some people have memories that are so horrible that they interfere with their lives. Soldiers who have witnessed the horrors of war and victims of violent crime, for example, can be tormented by their memories. They may



suffer from severe anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares, anger, or depression. Learning to cope with such memories can take years of treatment, and some people never recover from their experiences. For these people, the ability to erase a memory could be truly lifesaving.

"Erasing a memory and then everything bad built on that is an amazing idea, and I can see all sorts of potential," says Kate Farinholt, director of the National Alliance of Mental Illness of Maryland.

### It's a Little Scary

Farinholt and other experts also

see serious problems with the idea of erasing memories. "Completely deleting a memory . . . is a little scary," she says. "How do you remove a memory without removing a whole part of someone's life?" Many people believe that our experiences—the bad as well as the good—make us who we are. Each experience helps us grow. Would losing a memory take away the wisdom gained from that experience? Simply put, would erasing memories change who we are? Other concerns exist as well. What if, while trying to erase one memory, other memories are erased by accident? What if the pill were to fall into the wrong hands—could crime victims be forced to take the drug to stop them from talking to the police? Also, would people act differently if they knew that they wouldn't have to remember what they did? Finally, where would we draw the line between a memory that is bad enough to erase and one that isn't—and who would get to draw that line? No one is suggesting that memory-erasing pills be sold on drugstore shelves like aspirin. The idea is that such pills would be given only to people who are truly crippled by their terrible experiences. For these people, it would likely be a pill of last resort, taken only if other methods fail. In the debate over memory-erasing drugs, at least one thing is for sure: There's a lot to keep in mind. ●

## What Do You Think?

**WOULD YOU SUPPORT THE USE OF MEMORY-ERASING DRUGS?** Go back to the article to find arguments that support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



### YES

THIS SOUNDS BRILLIANT.

1 It could totally improve the lives of people suffering from traumatic experiences.

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### NO

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**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS**—and decide what you think about this issue. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become a thesis statement for an essay on this topic.

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